

Washington State Patrol Social Security Administration Department of Social & Health Services



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Cooperative Disability Investigative Unit (CDIU) Saves taxpayers \$2 million in October 2003

SEATTLE – Taxpayers saved almost \$2 million in combined state and federal savings during the month of October, thanks to a new investigative unit that combines the expertise of several state agencies and law enforcement units to weed out fraudulent applications for Social Security disability benefits.

With the October total, the unit's savings for the year so far have already topped \$8.7 million, and spokesmen now estimate the unit can produce annual savings of up to \$12 million.

Formed in January 2003, the investigative unit is called the Seattle Cooperative Disability Investigative Unit (CDIU). It investigates suspicious claims for federal disability benefits as well as individuals receiving benefits illegally.

The CDIU meshes state resources from the Washington State Patrol Criminal Investigation Division and the Medical Assistance Administration of DSHS with the federal resources of the Social Security Administration. It operates under the direction of Social Security's Office of the Inspector General.

The Seattle CDIU was formed in January 2003 to actively pursue individuals who make fraudulent federal and state benefit claims in Washington State. The Seattle CDIU is one of four new investigative units this year, joining 17 others nationwide.

During October 2003, the Seattle CDIU ranked first among the 18 existing units in the amount of taxpayer savings -- \$1,957,975.

"The idea of the CDIU is to stop fraud before it can even get started," said DDDS Director Dr. Martin A.H. "Tony" Jones, Ph.D. "We may have an application that claims someone is severely disabled, and yet other evidence that the same person was seen water-skiing. The CDI unit gives us the investigative muscle to look into those suspect claims immediately."

Law and order – CDIU case file

Seattle CDIU investigators were also saluted this year after an investigation into a shop owner who said her disability was forcing her to close her business. Because of inconsistent statements, the case was assigned to CDI, whose investigators found that she had closed her store – then opened a new one across town. They visited the store and found her carrying items, cleaning, hanging up signs, and serving customers – including the investigators, who posed as shoppers. The disability claim was denied.

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The unit is giving special attention to about 40 suspicious cases a month – out of the almost 6,000 disability applications the state DDDS processes each month.

Jones' department evaluates medical evidence to support applications for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments for the Blind or Disabled and for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits. Although Social Security is a federal program, it funds state agencies like the DDDS to make its disability determinations.

According to Social Security Administration (SSA) Regional Commissioner Carl L. Rabun, his agency is also covering the cost of the CDIU. "In just a short time, the CDIU concept has proven itself very effective in helping us detect fraud and reduce program abuse," Rabun said.

Ron Legan, SSA OIG Special Agent in Charge for Seattle, agrees. He calls the CDIU an excellent example of cooperation among federal, state and local interests. "We are all committed to reducing disability fraud and unnecessary costs to the taxpayer," he said.

"We had seen a program like this work with great success in Oregon," explained Washington State Patrol Chief Ronal Serpas. "I am so proud to work collaboratively with DSHS and SSA and combine all our collective strengths to combat fraud. This is yet another example of how governmental agencies can work together on behalf of the people and make a difference."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND:

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